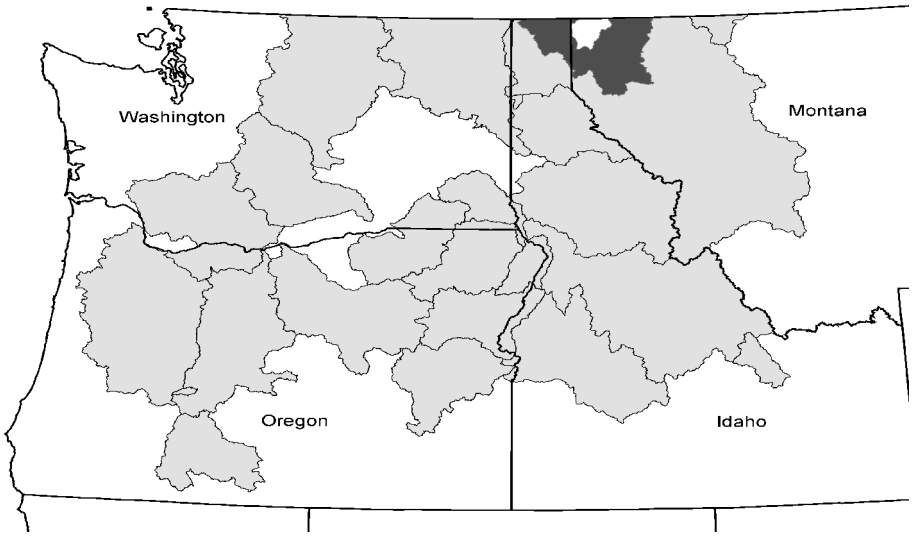
U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service

Bull Trout Draft Recovery Plan
and proposed Critical Habitat

Kootenai River Recovery Unit
(CHAPTER 4)



What areas are included in the Kootenai River Unit?
This recovery unit includes the Kootenai River drainage, occupying the northwestern corner of Montana and the northeastern tip of the Idaho panhandle. The Kootenai River is uniquely configured, entering northwest Montana from British Columbia and then returning to Canada, where it joins the upper Columbia River drainage. This recovery unit includes four core areas with a total of 10 currently identified local populations in the Kootenai River, Lake Koocanusa upstream from Libby Dam, Bull Lake, and Sophie Lake. Canadian portions of the drainage are essential to bull trout recovery, but are not formally included in the Kootenai Recovery Unit boundaries.

How much of the area is proposed as critical habitat?
This unit includes proposed critical habitat areas totaling 368 miles of streams and 30,094 acres of lakes and reservoirs. The stream mileage represents approximately 7 percent of the total stream distance in the recovery unit found on 1:100,000 series map coverage.

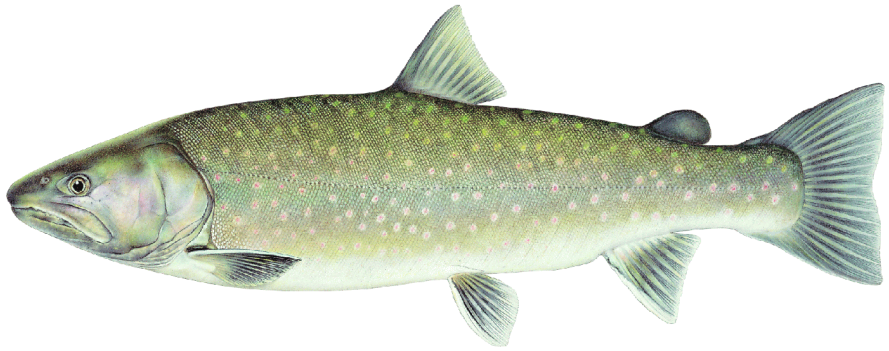
Who developed the draft Bull Trout Recovery Plan and critical habitat proposal?
The draft recovery plan for bull trout range-wide was developed through the collaboration of federal, state, tribal and private biologists working with representatives of local watersheds, private landowners and industry and conservation organizations. A total of 24 local recovery unit teams contributed to the development of the draft recovery plans. Plans were built upon the foundation established by previous State bull trout planning efforts in Montana and Idaho.

These recovery unit teams included experts in biology, hydrology and forestry, as well as natural resource users and stakeholders with interest and knowledge of bull trout and the habitats they depend on for survival. The critical habitat proposal was based in large part on information on the current distribution and habitat characteristics of the species.

What is the relationship between the draft Bull Tout Recovery Plan and the critical habitat proposal?
The draft recovery plan and critical habitat proposal are closely linked. The information developed by the recovery unit teams, and the science underlying that information, are the basis for the critical habitat proposals. However, critical habitat is designed to provide for the conservation of a species by identifying those areas essential for conservation and requiring special management, whereas a recovery plan is a much larger blueprint for the eventual recovery and de-listing of a species.

Who would be affected by recovery efforts and a critical habitat designation?
A recovery plan is advisory only and carries no regulatory authority. It is the Fish and Wildlife Service's estimation of the actions necessary for the recovery of the species. Agencies, communities or individuals would be involved only if they are taking voluntary actions to benefit bull trout.

Federal agencies are required to consult with the Fish and Wildlife Service on actions they carry out, fund, or authorize that might affect critical habitat. It is important to note that in most cases, this is already occurring under the section 7 interagency consultation requirements of the Endangered Species Act. Non-federal entities, including private landowners, that may also be affected could include, for example, those seeking a U.S. Army Corps of Engineers 404 permit under the Clean Water Act to build an in-water structure, those seeking federal approval to discharge effluent into the aquatic environment, or those seeking federal funding to implement private property improvements, where such actions affect the aquatic environment that has been designated as critical habitat. But again, in most cases where this link between activities on private lands and Federal funding, permitting, or authorization exists, consultation under section 7 of the Endangered Species Act is already occurring.



A critical habitat designation does not have any effect on non-federal entities when there is not a federal nexus. For example, swimming, boating, fishing, farming, ranching, or any of a range of activities normally conducted by a landowner or operator of a business not involving federal funding, permitting, or authorization in order to occur would not be affected.

How was the draft recovery plan for each unit developed?
Recovery units were delineated based on the biology of the species and considerations for paralleling existing state conservation and fisheries management frameworks wherever possible. Recovery teams incorporated existing state conservation processes to the degree possible, depending on the degree to which they had been developed (for example, the Montana Bull Trout Restoration Plan, the State of Idaho's Bull Trout Conservation Plan, the State of Washington's Statewide Strategy to Recover Salmon and the Oregon Plan for Salmon and Watersheds).

What is the status of bull trout in the Kootenai River Recovery Unit?
The historic distribution of bull trout throughout the Kootenai River drainage was somewhat patchy due to natural barriers in many tributary drainages. Major watersheds such as the Yaak River drainage were not known to be historically occupied by bull trout. Bull trout distribution remains patchy. Bull trout numbers have not been monitored in all areas within this recovery unit, but in some areas their decline has been scientifically documented.

One area of exception is the Lake Koocanusa core area, where dramatic increases in bull trout abundance have occurred in the past decade. Most spawning and rearing habitat for bull trout in the Lake Koocanusa core area is in British Columbia, which is important for recovery purposes even though it is outside the legal jurisdiction of the Endangered Species Act. If British Columbia populations are not maintained recovery cannot occur.

What are the threats to bull trout in the Kootenai River Recovery Unit?
The completion of Libby Dam, in 1972, resulted in blockage of the migratory corridor of the Kootenai River and caused dramatic changes in flow patterns, water quality, and water temperatures in the downstream portion of the Kootenai River that negatively impacted bull trout populations. Coincidentally, the expanded reservoir habitat and forage base upstream from the dam provided suitable habitat for bull trout abundance in the Lake Koocanusa core area to increase above historical levels.

Other basinwide threats include sediment loads in streams as a result of forestry and road and railroad construction, water quality problems due to mining, and fisheries management issues (poaching, introduction of non-native species and increasing angler activity).

What are the recovery goals and objectives?

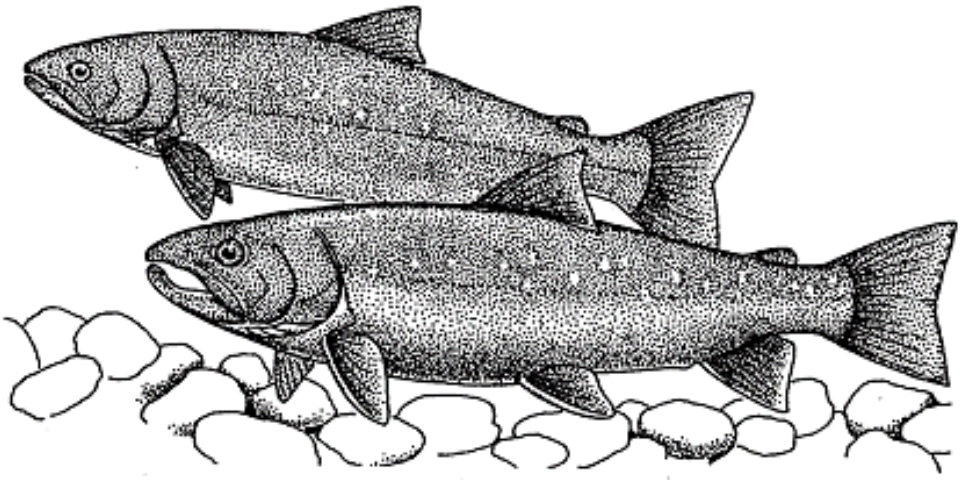
The goal of the bull trout recovery plan is to ensure the long-term persistence of self-sustaining, complex interacting groups of bull trout distributed across the species' range so that the species can be de-listed. To recover bull trout in the Kootenai River Unit there needs to be a net increase in bull trout abundance in the Kootenai River core area, downstream of Libby Dam.

What are the criteria for measuring recovery? Recovery will be measured according to four criteria: distribution, abundance, population trends and connectivity in the watershed. The recovery plan includes specific, quantifiable standards for each of these criteria.

A distinction in this recovery unit has been made between primary and secondary core recovery areas - based mostly on size, connectivity and complexity of each watershed and the degree of natural population isolation. Lake Koocanusa and the Kootenai River/Kootenay Lake complex downstream of Libby Dam are the two primary core areas. Bull Lake and Sophie Lake are the two secondary core areas.

- Distribution criteria will be met when the total number of identified local populations (currently 10) is maintained or increased and local populations remain broadly distributed in all four core areas.
- Abundance criteria will be met when each of the primary core areas have at least 1,000 adult bull trout and are scientifically documented to host at least five local populations (including British Columbia tributaries) of 100 adults each.
- Trend criteria will be met when the overall bull trout population in the unit is accepted as stable or increasing for at least 10 years.
- Connectivity criteria will be met when dam operational issues are satisfactorily addressed at Libby Dam and when more than half of the existing passage barriers identified as inhibiting bull trout migration in smaller streams within the unit have been remedied.

What actions will be necessary to recover bull trout in the Kootenai River Recovery Unit?
Actions to recover bull trout in the Kootenai recovery unit generally consist of enhancing habitat, improving water quality, restoring stream connectivity and opportunities for migration, and enhancing opportunities for genetic exchange among local bull trout populations. Other recovery actions include improvements to



forestry practices in bull trout habitat to reduce sediment delivery to streams and changes to some fisheries management practices. More details are available in the full text of the Kootenai River Recovery Unit (Chapter 4 of the draft Bull Trout Recovery Plan).

How long will recovery take?
A recovery plan is advisory only and carries no regulatory authority; therefore it is difficult to determine how long it will take to recover bull trout in the Kootenai Recovery Unit. However, given our best estimate of what government agencies and others might do, it could take three to five bull trout generations, or 15 to 25 years, before identified threats to the species can be significantly reduced and bull trout can be considered eligible for delisting.

How much will recovery cost?
Estimating the cost of recovery is difficult and complex, due to many variables and unknowns. However, the Kootenai Recovery Unit team has estimated that recovery could cost about $17 million. This includes estimates of expenditures by local, Tribal, State and Federal governments and by private business and individuals. The estimates are attributed to bull trout conservation but other aquatic species also will benefit.

How can I obtain copies of the documents?

The documents, along with maps, fact sheets, photographs and other materials may be found on the Pacific Region's website at http://species.fws.gov/bulltrout.

How can I comment?
The Service will be accepting comments, beginning November 29, 2002, on its draft recovery plan for bull trout in the Columbia and Klamath river basins and in the St. Mary-Belly River Basin in Montana. Comments on the draft recovery plan will be accepted for 90 days until February 27, 2003.

Comments on the draft recovery plan may be mailed to the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Snake River Basin Office, attn: Robert Ruesink, Supervisor, 1387 S. Vinnell Way, Room 368, Boise, ID 83709; faxed to 208-378-5262, or sent via e-mail to fw1srbocomment@fws.gov

Beginning November 29, 2002, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service will accept comments from the public on the agency's proposal to designate critical habitat for the Columbia River and Klamath River distinct population segments of bull trout. Comments will be accepted for 60 days until January 28, 2003.

Comments on the critical habitat proposal may be submitted to John Young, Bull Trout Coordinator, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, 911 N.E. 11th Avenue, Portland Oregon 97232; faxed to 503.231.6243 or e-mailed to R1bulltroutCH@r1.fws.gov

FORMAL HEARINGS and PUBLIC MEETINGS

Two public information meetings and formal hearings to take testimony are scheduled. The information meetings will be from 1 p.m. to 3 p.m. The formal public hearing will be from 6 p.m. to 8 p.m as follows:

January 7, 2003 - Polson, MT
KwaTaqNuk Resort;
303 U.S. Hwy 93.

January 9, 2003 - Spokane, WA
West Coast Grand Hotel
303 West North River Drive.

Four additional public infor-mation meetings and open houses are scheduled. Written comments may be submitted at any of these:

January 8, 2003 - Missoula MT
Montana Fish Wildlife and Parks
3201 Spurgin Road (3pm - 7 pm)

January 14, 2003 - Kalispell MT
Montana Fish Wildlife and Parks
490 N. Meridian Rd (3pm-7pm)

January 15, 2003 - Sandpoint ID
City Forum
418 N. 3rd Ave (6 pm - 8 pm)

January 16, 2003 - Libby MT
Kootenai National Forest HQ
1101 Highway 2 West (3pm-7pm)

This is only a brief summary.

Please see full draft recovery plan and critical habitat proposal for complete details.